



BROTHERHOOD

Discussion Guide

The year is 1867, the South has been defeated, and the American Civil War is over. But the conflict goes on. Yankees now patrol the streets of Richmond, Virginia, and its citizens, both black and white, are struggling to redefine their roles and relationships. By day, fourteen-year-old Shadrach apprentices with a tailor and sneaks off for reading lessons with Rachel, a freed slave, at her school for African-American children. By night he follows his older brother Jeremiah to the meetings of a group whose stated mission is to protect Confederate widows like their mother. But as the true murderous intentions of the group, now known as the Ku Klux Klan, are revealed, Shad finds himself trapped between old loyalties and what he knows is right.

In this powerful and unflinching story of a family caught in the period of Reconstruction, A.B. Westrick provides a glimpse into the enormous social and political upheaval of the time.

Questions for further research, discussion, and conversation:

1. The thirteenth amendment to the United States constitution, adopted in 1865, prohibits slavery and involuntary servitude. Although Shad's family never owned slaves, they still felt the effects of the amendment. Find evidence in the text that describes their feelings. Do you think their behavior was typical of the time? Why or why not? (Reference pages 257-263).
2. After the Civil War, many white Southerners began to describe the Confederacy as "a noble lost cause," and in *Brotherhood*, Mama says Daddy "died a noble death" (page 302). In the context of the story, define the word noble. Why does she use this word in this situation? Why did Southerners come to describe their part in the war this way?
3. Granddaddy says, "Schooling coloreds. Ain't nothing good to come of it" (page 316). What was the Weaver family's general feeling toward schooling? What disturbed Granddaddy about allowing people of color to get an education?
4. Mama tells Shad, "some is meant for schooling and some not" (page 112). What effect did Mama's low expectation of Shad have on him? What was Shad's learning disability, and what motivated him to want to read?
5. The fourteenth amendment to the United States constitution, adopted in 1868, grants citizenship to all people born in the United States, and guarantees them equal protection under the law. The fifteenth amendment, ratified in 1870, grants all citizens the right to vote. Although the story in *Brotherhood* takes place before the passage of these two amendments, Southerners were aware that politicians were arguing over these issues. Mama says, "And them Perkinsons—they're like all them Yankees—they're happy the war ended the way it did. When there's something men got to decide in Washington, the Perkinsons side with them Yankees" (page 263). How did Southerners think these two amendments would affect the balance of power in the South? What changes were hardest for white Southerners like Mama to accept?
6. Mama says, "Just thinking about coloreds ruling Virginia, why, it's enough to make George Washington cry" (page 264). What does this statement tell you about Mama? How do you think the Weaver family would react to a prediction that in the future (2008) an African American man would be elected President of the United States? How might Miss Elizabeth have reacted to such a prediction? Find statements in the text to support your opinions.
7. Although Granddaddy is a member of the KKK, he fears that the brotherhood is "overstepping boundaries" (page 18), and Shad notes that Granddaddy isn't "easy about Klan business" (page 318). Why would a man like Granddaddy join the Klan and go along with them even though he questioned some of their actions?

8. What did Rachel mean by the comment that “every other colored family is scattered across the South” (page 323)? How did the institution of slavery affect the structure of African-American families?
9. Shad thought that Jeremiah had “too much pride to stand on a street corner and wait for a day job from a carpetbagger” (page 73). What was a carpetbagger? Do you agree or disagree with Mr. O’Malley (page 53) and Jeremiah (page 301) that George Nelson was a carpetbagger? Why?
10. Rachel tells Shad that “the Freedmen’s Bureau is giving food to everyone who needs it” (page 65), and Miss Elizabeth says that she’s grateful for the bureau’s support (page 97). What was the Freedmen’s Bureau? Can you think of organizations today (both government agencies and non-government) that provide help similar to that provided by the Freedmen’s Bureau?
11. There are two instances in *Brotherhood* in which boys set out “to have a little fun” with the freedmen. Describe the two instances. *Brotherhood* gives us a glimpse of the boys’ side of the story, but not the victims’ point of view. How do you think the freedmen might have felt, and what might the impact of these “fun” pranks have been on them? (Reference pages 143-148, and 174-183).
12. The reader does not hear Miss Elizabeth ask Rachel to let Shad attend her school (reference pages 103-105). Imagine their conversation and write it from Rachel’s point of view. How might the final scene at the marketplace (pages 352-355) have been different if written from Rachel’s point of view?
13. Shad’s relationship with the school children changes throughout the novel. How is his first attitude toward them (pages 127-136) different from his attitude later, when he wants to shout, “Amen!” that Rachel and the children are still alive (page 355). Identify scenes when you see Shad’s attitude begin to change. What do you think is the most significant turning point in his relationship with the children?
14. How would you feel about Jeremiah if he were your older brother? Identify passages where Shad (A) admires Jeremiah, (B) fears him, (C) stands up to him, and (D) fails to stand up to him. Take one of those passages and describe how you would have handled it the same as Shad did, or differently.
15. How did you feel about Jeremiah when he was arrested the second time? In the scene at Libby Prison, did you believe the Yankee’s statement that Jeremiah had resisted arrest (page 346)? If Jeremiah were to tell his side of the story, how might he describe what happened the night the Perkinson’s shed burned? Now re-write that scene from Rachel’s point of view.
16. How did Shad justify the rise of the Ku Klux Klan (page 293)? What do you think of his justification? What could Virginians and other Southerners have done after the war to prove to the Yankees that they could and would handle their own problems? Why did Northerners think that martial law was necessary? In what foreign countries today do American soldiers patrol the streets, and how are today’s situations the same or different from the American South after the Civil War?

